# I DARE YOU

Commencement Address
by President Novice G. Fawcett

The Ohio State University
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Historically--and perhaps by premeditation--the President of this University has given the commencement address quadrennially. I have been told that the theory behind this traditional schedule is that once in four years--not necessarily more often than that--a president might have an idea worth exploiting.

In any case, according to Eric Ashby, Master of Clare College, Cambridge, ideas entertained by college administrators are sometimes forced to follow devious paths before they reach fruition. "In British universities," says Dr. Ashby, "naked enterprise on the part of a university president is regarded with suspicion, not to say alarm. If a president has a bright idea . . . he must unobtrusively--if possible anonymously--feed it into the organization, at quite a low level, informally over morning coffee, and watch it percolate slowly upward. With luck it will come to his desk months later for approval, and he must greet it with the pleased surprise which parents exhibit when their children show them what Santa Claus has brought them for Christmas."

Surely there must be a lesson in Dr. Ashby's illustration for American university presidents as well!

Whether or not I have an idea to expound, this commencement provides me with several reasons for appearing as the speaker, although I have rather ambivalent feelings about my task. As a parent of a member of this class, I would prefer, on this joyous occasion, to sit among other parents here and, at the appropriate time, say proudly to Mrs. Fawcett, "There is our daughter."

Nevertheless, because of the excellent record of this class and because I cherish personal acquaintanceship with many of you, I have a special measure of pride and satisfaction in delivering this address, and I welcome a self-made opportunity to express a few personally valued ideas.

May I briefly but sincerely express my gratitude and that of the University to each of the graduating seniors? This June Class of 1965, to complete the memorabilia of its activities here, commissioned a portrait of the President as its gift to the Universiy, a gesture which humbled me but for which I am doubly appreciative when I consider the excellent quality of the artist's work and the fine result he achieved with so difficult a subject. I do not yet know where the portrait will be hung (parenthetically, there are some, no doubt, who wonder when the President will be hung!), but perhaps eventually its resting place will be in our new Center for Tomorrow. Wherever it may be placed, I hope, with all humility, that it will be viewed not as a memorial to an individual but as a symbol

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of that individual's dedicated belief in the goal of this University--the highest peak of excellence in education. In the words of the Apocrypha, I trust that future generations of students may "consider that I labored not for myself only, but for all them that seek learning."

This morning marks the 36th commencement during my tenure at this University. In my entire career as an educator, I have attended and participated in some 200 such programs, and have had ample opportunity to study what commencement speakers try to do. I have learned that some speakers promote a vested interest. Others present the wisdom of their experience, propounding certain precepts and doctrines which they hope will guide people toward what they should be and what they should do. Still others cast before their audience a panorama of life's complexities and perversities; or they survey part of our social structure and present findings which they believe compose the mosaic of the future. And there are some who rely on inspiration to stimulate and provide an incentive for their listeners.

All of these are good techniques, and I shall probably use some of them, but, fundamentally, my objective is to present you with some challenges; to say--loudly and clearly--"I dare you!" My paramount challenge to you is the challenge that confronts us as a nation and as individuals: to raise high your standards of excellence--your standards of thought, behavior, taste, aspirations; to keep ever in your mind and actions the values which will be expressive of your loftiest goals. As Paul the Apostle counseled Timothy: "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity . . . Neglect not the gift that is in thee . . . Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all."

Why, you may ask, is it necessary to emphasize the importance of values? Surely we all have the intellectual and moral strength with which to face the challenges of our maturity. And my answer is that <u>what</u> you think, <u>how</u> you think, and the personal decisions you make in the decades to come will help shape--for good or ill--the face of the future. And speaking of thinking: Let us remember that the ability to think acutely, perceptively, creatively is the most important function of man, and that the irrevocable condition of accelerating change and ever widening choices in our society will call upon all of your capability to think wisely and well.

Lucien Price pointed out that we have been catapulted into more change in the past fifty years than in the preceding three thousand years. Our progenitors, for example, drove oxen--but so did the warriors in Homer's <u>Iliad</u>. Now we travel down into the infinitely small of nuclear physics and upward into the inconceivable vastness of astronautical exploration. "In the past," said Mr. Price, "we were educated to live in a world as is; in the future we must be educated to function in a world where change comes fast and will keep on coming faster," affecting every aspect of life, including personal values.

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One of your greatest responsibilities, I firmly believe, is to develop personal values which will help create some kind of order and harmony and proportion in your own lives and in a world afflicted by unrest and uncertainty, by a breakdown of many of our standards of excellence.

Let us look briefly at a few of the evidences in our society of this degradation of moral principles. Perhaps the most obvious example is the 15 per cent annual increase in crime and the frightening statistic that approximately one person out of seventy-five commits a major offense. Figures from the Federal Bureau of Investigation point to a similar cancerous growth of what we euphemistically call "juvenile delinquency." For fifteen consecutive years there has been a sharp increase in arrests of young offenders under eighteen years of age, and it is a sad commentary on the state of our society that four out of every hundred young people become involved in crime.

How many delinquents are school drop-outs it would be difficult to estimate, but in 128 of the nation's largest cities the drop-out rate after grade 10 stands at a shocking 30 per cent. So that you may visualize what that figure means, imagine what would have happened if 30 per cent of this graduating class had been drop-outs: almost a thousand of you would not be here to receive diplomas today.

Alcoholism - admittedly a health as well as a moral problem - affects the well-being of our society only slightly less drastically than crime. The World Health Organization estimates that there are 5 million alcoholics in the United States and that 200,000 new cases arise annually.

Sociologists point to the epidemic proportions of divorce in our society. Consider these figures for a moment: one marriage out of every four ends in divorce, and in teen-age marriages, one out of two. Marriages of college graduates appear to have a better chance of permanence - only one out of twenty ends in divorce - but the fact remains, as I have heard it said, that "too many people who say 'I do' - don't!" According to these statistics, there could be more than 150 divorces among the members of this graduating class. This alone is an unhappy prospect, but consider also the somber situation of the children of divorce who, in their loneliness and lack of parental guidance, find themselves lost in the heterogeneity of a populace without values.

Equally and just as profoundly lost are some of today's teenagers whose parents appear to be less inclined than ever to proclaim the conventional "parental imperatives" or, denying their own values, have simply given up trying to communicate with their children. As one high school student commented, "I don't get any guidance at home. We're just a bunch of people who go about our business and live under one roof. One of these days I'd like to sit down and find out from my parents what they really believe in."

And now this past year has brought a radical testing of law and order on American college campuses everywhere across the land. Students have been using their campuses as a platform not only to express dissatisfaction with what is taking place in the world but

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to take action against the ills of society. Student demonstrations have flared up from a wide variety of causes ranging from segregation to all the manifestations of civil rights and civil liberties; from the whole concept of academic freedom to the complex issues of free speech; and from the conduct of America's foreign policy to the conduct of administrative policies in their own colleges and universities. These groups of students seem to believe that an institution of higher learning is designed to create a new social order by direct action, by force and coercion.

In contrast to this epidemic of rebellion and protest, the great body of students in our colleges remains dedicated to the idea of orderly and democratic procedures. Many of them, no doubt, have their own strong convictions about the need to reform certain social evils. They are aware of the value of questioning, the value of sharpening the cutting edge of their minds on the difficult problems of our time, but they recognize and respect the functions of inquiry and logic and debate in the pursuit of truth.

Lest you think me a pessimist or a prophet of doom, let me assure you that I stress these negative qualities of our society only because I believe that each one of you possesses the basic values to be seriously concerned with what goes on around you. I think you will subscribe to this statement of principles from the

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Rockefeller Report on Education: "We do not believe that men were meant to live in degradation . . . We believe that man - by virtue of his humanity - should live in the light of reason, exercise moral responsibility, and be free to develop to the full the talents that are in him."

What, then, shall be the pattern of your service in a world plagued with frightful statistics of narcotics addiction, with waves of indecency and pornography inundating our literature, and with inequality of opportunity stifling the intellectual creativity of man? According to Dr. Samuel Miller, Dean of the Harvard Divinity School, "The revolutionary changes that have been wrought in our world demand a new kind of person. Whatever form it takes, it will matter little if we, in all our suffering, cannot produce a person having such inner magnitude as to pull the mad chaos of our world into some kind of new shape, to put the impress of a larger spirit on it."

But the opportunity to impress <u>your</u> spirit upon the world presents also a responsibility - the responsibility of active participation, of dedicated citizenship, of service to others. For, after all, democracy in action is not a spectator sport. Each citizen is an important player. To the extent that he does not participate, he is weakening the essential fabric of society; by his silence and his apathy, he is encouraging the enemies of freedom and contributing to a further breakdown of social values. Edward Gibbon, historian of <u>The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire</u>, said of the Athenians: "When the freedom they wished most was freedom from responsibllity, Athens ceased to be free and was never free again."

Whatever form your participation may take, it will not be an easy task; it will require, on your part, the courage of conviction and commitment. So I dare you now to accept the challenges, often unspoken, which come from within yourselves. Those challenges are often easy to ignore, because you know that no one but yourself has heard them; no one will compel you to accept the dare; no one will make fun of you or call you a coward.

No one, that is, but yourself.

I urge you, therefore, to face the challenges squarely and to evaluate them in terms of your own high quality of mind and strength of character. I urge you, in the words of Emerson, "to believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men."

You could illustrate this point from the literature of your own religion, but permit me to paraphrase from the story of Peter the Apostle and his denial of Jesus. Peter, history recounts, was an impulsive and generous man, impressive in physical stature and steadfast in his faith. But he had moments of weakness. When Jesus was taken from Gethsemane to be questioned by the high priest, Peter had the courage to follow; but when he was questioned three times about his identity and his loyalties, he shrank from his true self and refused to admit that he was one of the disciples. To quote the Gospel according to St. Luke: "And Peter remembered the words of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crows, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly."

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Next, my friends, I dare you to build into your lives not only strong moral values but the courage of action which will give them validity and make them work in today's world. Now why is the word "courage" so often associated with values which should be an integral part of our everyday lives? Is it because we are embarrassed to display these virtues? Or because we are afraid of pressures, afraid to say no, afraid to be different? Fear or cynicism or conformity -- not one of these is an acceptable reason for discarding moral values, or for hiding them. "One man with courage makes a majority," said Andrew Jackson. In fact, courage in its highest form - moral courage - is what makes a person indestructible, for each act of courage adds to man's faith in himself and in the purpose and dignity of life. If courage is required, then I say that you should have the determination to build ever more solidly the bulwark of values you have acquired from the great lessons of your spiritual faith and from your belief in humanity. Marcus Aurelius, in his Meditations, admonished that "Thou must be like a promontory of the sea, against which, though the waves beat continually, yet it both itself stands, and about it are those swelling waves stilled and quieted."

My next challenge - "Dare to face the discipline of work" - may not appear to be pertinent to this occasion, for by virtue of the degrees that will be awarded to you this morning you have proved that you possess the capacity for disciplined and fruitful effort. But in the ventures that lie ahead - in business and the professions, in continued academic work and in the home - you will find that there is not only dignity to be achieved from well-disciplined work, but one of life's greatest pleasures, for work can be the delight of doing a job superbly well, the excitement of creativity, the satisfaction of being interested in everything you do and the ability to extend that interest endlessly in the never completed task of learning.

Finally, I dare you to have faith in America's free enterprise system. All of us depend upon business and industry for the houses we live in, the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the books we read - for everything that touches our daily lives - yet many of us take our free enterprise system for granted, forgetting that it is the key to our success as a nation and the foundation of our freedom. Henry R. Luce, editor and publisher of Fortune, describes our business-enterprise system as "the greatest miracle of them all . . . . It meets the demands of business men that it should provide ample opportunity for production for profit - and it also meets the demands of the welfare of all the people. . . . It is the genius of America that it has worked out an economic system by which the public interest is continually represented, while the public enjoys the blessings of liberty and the fruits of competitive and skillful management and initiative. In most of the rest of the world you will not find anything like this."

So long as business enterprise continues to expand its responsibilities in the public interest, to that extent we will not become a welfare state, demanding security in place of freedom. I believe that a simple phrase, the right to choose, expresses well a major reason for America's great economic and cultural strength - a reason why our free-enterprise system and our system of government complement one another so perfectly.

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The American has always had the right to choose his job; the right to use his earnings as he wishes; the right to choose his education, his religion, his home, his public servants. He has the right to make his own decisions; the right to risk failure or gain success. This doctrine is a dynamic one, and, in my opinion, by placing your faith in a strong and free economy you will be helping to preserve one of the great forces that have given us strength individually and as a nation.

What, in truth, are these values we have been discussing? Actually, they evolve out of a lifetime of experience of building simple meanings into complex concepts of thought and behavior. Further refined and enriched, these concepts become the values by which we live and by which we serve. Built on a discipline of the mind, our values constitute our greatest strength, giving us the power not only to discriminate between right and wrong but to experience intellectual and emotional pleasure in such things as the companionship of books, the inspiration of noble architecture and great art, the sound of music, the majesty of mountains, sea, and stars - in fact, in all things that have integrity and beauty.

I have tried to present for your consideration some standards of excellence which may serve as a guide in our world of shifting values because I so strongly believe that your sense of values and your active participation can be poignant in the transformation of life. So once more I dare you, in the spirit of Tennyson's Ulysses, to

> . . .Follow knowledge like a shining star beyond the utmost bound of human thought. . . . Come, my friends, 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world. Push off, and sitting well in order smite the sounding furrows; for my purpose holds to sail beyond the sunset, and the baths of all the Western stars, until I die . . . To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

It is argued that history will judge us by our culture rather than by our material accomplishments. A culture is continuously recreated for good or for ill. For some, this recreation will be a dreary burden; for others, it will be an invitation to greatness. In the spirit of the "dare" with which I began, I urge you, with your freshness of vision, to bring new vitality to values in your own behavior as you face the catastrophes of social ills, pressures, and cruelties.

What was Keats' reference to man's ability to locate the citadel inside himself? It is always difficult to deal with the interior struggle between good and evil, exhilaration and defeatism. But there will be no need for despair. Something indomitable in man wants goodness to prevail. The values you hold in trust will elevate man out of perversity into a better life.

Therefore, I say: Strive, my friends, to attain the lofty eminence of that pinnacle in life which will ennoble the mind and inspire you to nourish and exalt the human spirit.